Anonymous No Longer:
The Evolution of the Autobiographical Impulse from Austen to Angelou

Jenny Claire Whitlow

TC 660H
Plan II Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

May 11, 2017

Carol MacKay, Ph.D.
Department of English
Supervising Professor

Lance Bertelsen, Ph.D.
Department of English
Second Reader

Abstract

Author: Jenny Claire Whitlow

Title: Anonymous No Longer: The Evolution of the Autobiographical Impulse from Austen to Angelou

Supervising Professors: Dr. Carol MacKay, Dr. Lance Bertelsen

This thesis touches three centuries to analyze the progression of the autobiographical impulse in the works of Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and Maya Angelou. By introducing a brief history of the state of women writers during each period before delving into the individual works, the essay explores what genres the three writers utilize to write about their lives. It is not the intention of this thesis to argue that these women pioneered the genre in which they wrote about their lives; rather, the thesis explores how each woman author, whether intentionally or unintentionally, serves as an exemplar for women, past and present, to look to as women write their own lives. This thesis claims that while Austen scatters pieces of her identity throughout her fictional characters in order to self-reflect, Virginia Woolf creates a more integrated identity through the use of memoirs as each memoir represents a "snapshot" of Woolf's life. Lastly, Maya Angelou creates an almost fully integrated, open identity by writing about entire portions of her life through various autobiographies. Whether through fiction, memoir, or autobiography, this thesis evaluates how each woman author utilized her works to explore different aspects of her personality as well as specific events that shaped her life. With each author, the autobiographical impulse becomes more apparent and unfiltered. By connecting the works of the three women, this thesis assesses how each woman author explores and creates her own sense of self.

Acknowledgements

A most heartfelt ‘thank you’ to:

Dr. Carol MacKay, for introducing me to a plethora of strong women writers as a freshman. Your class sparked in me a continually growing interest in exploring autobiographical writing. It is because of the love for your class that this thesis became an idea four years ago, and it is because of your constant guidance that this idea has come to fruition.

Dr. Lance Bertelsen, for beginning my love affair with Jane Austen. Your World Literature class was my first and one of my most memorable classes in my four years at UT. Thank you for your direction in navigating the intricacies of Austen’s life, for your encouragement, and for your ever-present Hawaiian shirts that never failed to make me smile.

My family and friends, for believing in me, for encouraging me, for pushing me farther than I thought possible, for constantly inspiring me, and for loving me so well. This thesis is a testament to your love and support.

God, for through Him all things are possible.

Table of Contents

Introduction

She begins by pulling a crayon across a white, blank page. The lines morph into various shapes—pink skies, trees that bear candy rather than fruit, a favorite doll, a soccer ball, a sketch of a best friend, a beloved pet, parents or siblings— the work of a young child who cannot express her life through words, so she draws instead. As the young child grows, she learns how to weave sentences together and trades in her crayon for a pencil. She begins to scribble into a "top-secret" diary the name of her school-boy crush, the sleepover that will occur in a few days, and the soccer game that follows the day after. Soon the child is a young woman, writing in a journal about her classes, her endeavors, how the school-boy crush is now with her best friend, which she convinces herself does not matter. The pencil turns into a pen as she goes off to college and jots down her thoughts in a journal that shares a page with study schedules for her finals, dreams of what she will one day accomplish with the degree she so dutifully pursues, her troubled heart that aches for home and the warmth of her mother's comforting arms around her, and the feeling of loneliness for the first time. After four years, the young woman is fully grown as she begins her first "real adult" job. Soon, the tattered journals she kept are forgotten and replaced with a planner, a mixture of her own children's sketches of their worlds, post-its with reminders of the PTA meeting, and a folded paper with the car-pool schedule that directly conflicts with a meeting with her boss. The overloaded planner, resembling a pop-up book, begins to weigh her down. She stops writing about her life, instead trading her pen for a red marker to check off her to-do list.

Then, as a woman of fifty, she carries Christmas decorations up the stairs, into the attic, and as she sets down the box, she spies another dusty, dilapidated box in a dark corner labeled

"Sophy." Sophy opens the box to reveal a mess of pink skies and trees made of candy and her Little Mermaid diary from grade school and her journals from high school through college containing memories of football games and prom and sleepless nights in the library and road trips to nowhere with friends with whom she had lost touch. Submerged in these memories, Sophy becomes reacquainted with the triumphs, failures, and relationships that amassed to the fifty-year-old woman sitting in her attic that day. The memories remind Sophy of who she was, is, and desires to be. A weight seems to lift off her shoulders and her heart is rejuvenated as she carefully carries the tattered box down the stairs to share her life with her daughter…

Increasingly into the twenty-first century, women are putting pen to paper and writing about their lives. Rather than only writing in diaries or journals, women are writing their lives into essays, short stories, novels, memoirs, and autobiographies. By writing about their lives, women are exploring and grasping their own sense of self: their identity. However, women did not always possess the luxury of openly writing the self. Virginia Woolf, referring to women writers, claims, "Anonymity runs in their blood. The desire to be veiled still possesses them."[1] Additionally, Woolf surmises, "Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman" (*Room* 49). Although Woolf is referring to women who write poetry, the idea of anonymity can be extended to several genres in which women have dabbled.

For centuries, women writers have attempted to have their voices heard and their stories told through the power of ink and paper. The twenty-first century has been marked by the memoir as can be seen in Tina Fey's *BossyPants* (2011), Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2012), and Malala Yousafzai's *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the*

[1] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, foreword by Mary Gordon (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1989), 50. From this point forward will be cited in-text as "*Room.*"

Taliban (2013). With women becoming more comfortable expressing themselves through autobiographical writing, it is important to look back and recognize women who wrote about their lives and became exemplars for other women to look to as they write their own lives. In my thesis, I explore the progression of "writing the self" among three prominent women authors. Beginning in the nineteenth century and travelling into the twenty-first century, I analyze the works of three influential women writers—Jane Austen (1775-1817), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), and Maya Angelou (1928-2014)—and the evolution of the autobiographical tendencies found in their writings.

While I consider how each woman used a specific genre to self-reflect and write the self, I am not arguing that these women defined the genre in which they are writing. Additionally, I am not claiming that these authors were the only women writing about their life during their respective times. Rather, I chose to examine the works of Austen, Woolf, and Angelou as they were prominent women writers who wrote about their lives through different genres. With each author, the autobiographical impulse becomes more apparent and open.

Although there have been many research papers and books written about each of the authors and the works I am analyzing, I examine the overarching styles of autobiographical writing in each of the three authors' works. In particular, I consider how the author explored different parts of her identity through genres such as fiction, memoir, and autobiography. By studying the works of Austen, Woolf, and Angelou, I connect the dots between the autobiographical impulses of the three authors. The shifts between the different genres convey how, throughout time, these women authors used their works to evolve from creating a scattered identity through fictional characters to a more integrated identity through the use of memoir to

one integrated identity through autobiography. Specifically, I address the question, "What methods did Austen, Woolf, and Angelou utilize in order to write about their lives?"

Jane Austen in the 19th Century

I begin by focusing on three of Jane Austen's novels—*Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and *Persuasion* (1817)—and examining Austen's autobiographical tendencies in fictional works. Although Austen began writing her novels during the late-eighteenth century, she did not begin to publish her novels until the early-nineteenth century. In order to comprehend how Austen chose to write about herself within the confines of her novels, one must recognize the state of women writers during the time she was writing.

The beginning of the nineteenth century saw a lack of female writers due to the social constructs of the time. A popular social belief during this century was that men and women lived in "separate spheres." The spheres were divided into public and private, with women being seen as the weaker sex who were best suited for the private, domestic sphere, and men living in the public sphere due to their intellectual and physical prowess.[2] Moreover, women writers were thought to be immoral and "literary prostitutes." Thus, many women published anonymously, as Austen did by publishing under the anonymous signature "By a Lady," or they published under pseudonyms as did Mary Anne Evans as George Eliot. It was even less common that women wrote about what it was like to be a woman during this time without meeting much criticism. Therefore, women had to find creative ways in order to express themselves without enduring condemnation.

Rather than simply comparing and contrasting the direct parallels of Austen's life found in her novels (as many books have already been written on the subject), I introduce a new

[2] Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1660-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 30.

perspective by arguing that Austen utilizes her fictional characters to explore different parts of her identity through various characters in a given novel. By exploring concepts such as aspects of personality, specific decisions and their alternatives, and "what could have been," I discuss how Austen explores and comes to terms with her identity and specific decisions she made in life. Additionally, I consider how she seemingly writes an entirely new path for her life through her fictional works, allowing her to embrace her proto-feminist ideals.

Virginia Woolf in the 20TH Century

After examining different novels written by Austen, I consider the shift in autobiographical writing from fiction to memoir by examining Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and a collection of autobiographical essays published posthumously in *Moments of Being* (1976). During this century, women had more, yet still limited, access to education, and women writers were becoming more prominent; however, women writers still faced heavy scrutiny and criticism from male writers as well as society in general.

While some of Woolf's fictional works were autobiographical, this chapter focuses on the autobiographical writings Woolf kept private from the world—her memoirs. Through her memoirs, Woolf provides "snapshots" of various pivotal aspects of her life. However, the chapter breaks down the category of memoir into "filtered" and "unfiltered" snapshots. Each memoir, or "snapshot," represents a part of Woolf's identity that amassed to Woolf's sense of self. Unlike the scattered identity presented through fictional characters, a memoir provides a more integrated character as this genre exhibits specific autobiographical events the author chooses to write about that are not necessarily lived out through fictional characters. Woolf herself urged women to explore their genius through writing; however, Woolf was not yet ready to expose her intimate life to the world. Nevertheless, the posthumous publication of her intimate memoirs combined

with the memoirs she presented to the Memoir Club began to pave the way for women writers to explore their creative genius not only through fiction and poetry, but through self-reflection and self-expression in memoirs.

Maya Angelou in the 21st Century

Moreover, I discuss the shift in dominance from memoir to autobiography by evaluating several of Maya Angelou's autobiographies, specifically focusing on *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). While this particular autobiography was published in the twentieth century, it was Angelou's first autobiography that, through its national acclaim, opened the door for Angelou to write several more autobiographies into the twenty-first century. Angelou was one of the first African American women to openly write about their lives through several autobiographies. Autobiographies create the most integrated sense of identity among the three genres I analyze. Through the use of autobiographies, Angelou encourages women writers to candidly write about their lives in a way that proclaims, "This is my life. This is who I am. This is what it is like to be a woman." However, autobiographies, or any method of writing, cannot create a fully integrated character as the author still chooses specific life events she deems as pivotal; thus, this genre cannot fully capture the identity of the author. Nevertheless, autobiographies provide the clearest and most integrated identity that writing allows.

Lastly, I look forward and postulate what platforms or methods women are using and will use more prominently in the future to write about their lives. In the age of technology and social media, women are constantly finding new ways to write the self and express who they are. Moreover, social media allows women to connect with one another and encourage each other in writing their lives.

Chapter I: Exploring the Self through Fiction: Jane Austen

From the date of her first publication of *Sense and Sensibility* to present day, critics and biographers have attempted to create biographical parallels between Jane Austen's fictional characters and Austen's family and friends. According to Austen's nephew, James Edward (J.E.) Austen-Leigh, people "surmised that [Austen] took her characters from individuals with whom she had been acquainted."[3] To many, Austen's characters were so life-like and distinctive that it seemed as if the only conclusion was that "they must once have lived, and had been transferred boldly, as it were, into [Austen's] pages."[4] While some critics claimed Marianne and Elinor Dashwood were reproductions of Austen and her sister, Cassandra[5], another reviewer asserted that Austen had an acquaintance "called by his friends Mr. Bennet."[6] Additionally, R.W. Chapman observed that Austen was "'exceptionally and surprisingly dependent' on reality and 'family and biographical truth' as the 'basis of imaginary construction.'"[7]

Conversely, many of Austen's close relations discredit critics who attempt to draw these parallels. In his *Biographical Notice of The Author*, Austen's brother, Henry, states that although Austen's power of inventing characters seems "to have been intuitive, and almost unlimited,"

---

[3] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1886), 146.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Emily Auerbach, "An Excellent Heart: *Sense and Sensibility*," in *Bloom's Modern Critical View: Jane Austen*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), 253.

[6] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, *op cit.*

[7] R. W. Chapman, "Mansfield Park," *Times Literary Supplement*, in *Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive*, no: 1558 (1931) : 1006, accessed April 4, 2017, http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=txshracd2598&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200041386&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0.

Austen "drew from nature; but, whatever may have been surmised to the contrary, never from individuals."[8] Echoing Henry's statement seventy years later, J.E. Austen-Leigh asserts that Austen's own relations "never recognized any individual in her characters."[9] Austen-Leigh goes so far as to quote his aunt, claiming that when questioned by a friend on the subject, Austen stated "that she thought it quite fair to note peculiarities and weaknesses, but that it was her desire to create, not reproduce."[10] Additionally, in letters written between Austen and Cassandra, her confidant with whom Austen was known to discuss her works and to whom she never withheld secrets, no evidence was found that Austen had modeled any particular character based on a particular individual.[11]

Important to note, Cassandra later burned several letters Austen wrote to her, which Cassandra could have possibly deemed controversial. Within these letters, Austen may have disclosed the people in her life after whom she modeled her characters. Perhaps, Austen wrote scathing passages about the real man she modeled the insufferable Mr. Collins after or another letter praising the respectable woman she wrote as Mrs. Croft. Moreover, the letters may have contained material that would have shed an unfavorable light on Austen, and Cassandra could not bear to let the world be privy to such delicate moments in Austen's life. Nevertheless, readers

---

[8] Henry Austen, "Biographical Notice of the Author," in *Northanger Abbey: An Annotated Edition / Jane Austen*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 337. Original notice was written as a preface to *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, published together in 1817.

[9] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen,* 147. Because both accounts were written by familial connections, critics may claim that Austen-Leigh was simply echoing Austen's brother in order to highlight the genius of Austen's novels. Critics could conjecture that her relations were attempting to memorialize Austen as a literary genius, and to assert that her most illustrious characters were mere reproductions of people she already knew was to somewhat discredit Austen's lively imagination and cleverness. While it is important to note the potential bias in these references, going forward I will assume that these references attempt to be unbiased.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

and scholars alike will never be able to discover what were in the letters Cassandra decided to burn. Thus, it is mere speculation that the letters burned contained any type of information conveying Austen's characters were reproductions of people she knew.

Although there is evidence that indicates her characters were not mirroring individuals in her life, it is difficult to ascertain Austen's inspiration for her characters. While Austen may or may not have modeled her characters after her close relations, one idea is seemingly unequivocal: there are undeniable similarities between Austen's fictional characters and Austen's reality. Indeed, based on accounts from both biographers and Austen's familial relations regarding Austen, there is "something of Austen herself in all the heroines of her mature novels."[12]

Nevertheless, the object of this chapter is not to support those who believe the characters are reproductions of Austen's life by comparing and contrasting scenes that seem to parallel each other, nor is it my aim to discredit these observations. Rather, the goal of this chapter is to assert that *if* Austen's characters are based on her family and friends, it is *not* due to Austen's dependence on reality rather than her imagination. Instead, those who Austen models her characters after serve the specific purpose of allowing Austen to self-reflect and write about her life.

Various characters in Austen's novels are characterized by traits that parallel descriptions of Austen's personality. Focusing on the novels *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Persuasion*, the remainder of this chapter argues that Austen uses different characters throughout her novels to explore and come to terms with different aspects of her personality and decisions

---

[12] Marilyn Butler, "Austen, Jane (1775–1817)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), online ed., ed. David Cannadine, January 2010, accessed November 4, 2016, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/article/904.

she made in life. This chapter investigates Austen's autobiographical tendencies through three concepts: "Exploring Aspects of Personality" with a focus on Elinor Dashwood, Marianne Dashwood, and Mr. Darcy; "Exploring a Specific Life Choice and its Alternative" with a focus on Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas; and "Exploring What Could Have Been" with a focus on Anne Elliot and Mrs. Croft.

Exploring Aspects of Personality: *Sense and Sensibility*

By creating the characters of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* as well as Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen scatters various facets of her personality throughout her characters to explore different parts of her identity. Dispersing her identity between several characters enabled Austen to better understand and embrace the more "undesirable"[13] aspects of her personality as well as her more loveable characteristics. Additionally, through the characters of Marianne and Elinor, Austen explores several of her proto-feminist ideals.

Many assert that Austen identified more with Marianne Dashwood; however, by creating Elinor Dashwood, Austen embodies and explores her external self: the face she portrayed to the outside world. In biographical accounts regarding Austen, she is often referred to as somewhat awkward, reserved, and soft-spoken. Similarly, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor has deep, intense emotions, yet her demeanor is reserved and stoic. Austen describes Elinor as having an "excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate and her feelings were strong: but she knew how to govern them."[14] Elinor understood how to repress her feelings and hide them from the outside world. Similarly, towards strangers, Austen was said to be "chronically shy" and socially

---

[13] The term "undesirable" refers to characteristics that were seen as unfeminine and unbecoming of a woman in the 18th century.

[14] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7. From this point forward will be cited in-text as "*S&S*."

awkward, which "she compensated [for] by remaining silent."[15] To the outside world, Austen's social quirkiness and reserved nature was seemingly simply a part of who she was; however, her close relations assert Austen had a "bright character"[16] with a witty disposition. Several accounts from her family characterize Austen as the more emotional sister compared to Cassandra's "colder and calmer disposition."[17] Nevertheless, much like Elinor, Austen did not feel comfortable conveying this part of her personality to the outside world. Austen's reserved nature could be associated with the need to repress the strong emotions she felt.

However, although Elinor Dashwood primarily represents Austen's external self through her stoic nature, Elinor diverges for Austen's external self through her agreeable nature. In social settings, Elinor generally attempts to behave politely towards others, engaging in conversation and upholding the appropriate manners of a proper lady, even if she does not particularly enjoy those with whom she is socializing. For example, after Lucy reveals that she and Edward Ferrars, the man whom Elinor loves, are engaged, Elinor still attempts to behave pleasantly towards her. Though she does not care for Miss Steele, she sets aside her feelings and behaves politely and agreeably. This contrasts Austen's own behavior towards those she does not know well or dislikes. Towards these people, Austen was known for keeping to herself and refraining from socializing, even if this was not the proper behavior for a well-mannered lady. Instead, Austen acts much like Marianne does in social settings with people she does not know or enjoy. Unlike Elinor, Marianne, "who had never much toleration for anything like impertinence, vulgarity, inferiority of parts, or even difference of taste from herself, was at this time particularly ill-disposed…to be pleased with the Miss Steeles, or to encourage their advances…" (*S&S* 146).

---

[15] Marilyn Butler, "Austen, Jane (1775-1817)."
[16] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 94.
[17] Ibid., 15.

Similarly to Austen, Marianne not only fails to encourage other's social advances, she discourages them with an "invariable coldness of her behavior towards them" (*S&S* 146).

Thus, while Elinor embodies several of the characteristics that parallel Austen's external self, Marianne also seems to personify a few of these characteristics as well. Elinor and Marianne are not binary characters, one external and another internal; rather, the two characters are a mixture of the two as they are both part of Austen's identity and cannot be fully separated. However, Elinor primarily represents Austen's external self while Marianne predominantly represents Austen's internal self.

Nonetheless, while Austen appears to be a quiet, somewhat stoic woman to those who did not intimately know her, she also has a starkly contrasting side that was known to her relations and close friends. Through the character of Marianne Dashwood, Austen embodies her internal self, the part of herself that only her family and friends had the privilege of knowing. Austen refers to Marianne Dashwood as "sensible and clever, but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent." (*S&S* 7). Unlike her sister, Marianne is vivacious and sentimental, unable to hide her thoughts or emotions. Although this description starkly contrasts that of Elinor, there are several parallels between Marianne and Austen's personalities. Contrasting the meek Austen in the previous paragraph, several biographical accounts refer to her as witty, lively, flirtatious, outgoing, and outspoken. While to the outside world Austen was said to have a "placidity of temper," this reserved disposition was not irreconcilable with her "most lively imagination, and the keenest relish for wit."[18] Moreover, in a memoir regarding Austen's life, Austen's niece referred to her as the niece's favorite aunt, stating that Austen was "so playful," and her niece

[18] Henry Austen, "Biographical Notice of the Author," 335.

delighted in her "playful talk" as she "could make everything amusing to a child."[19] While to strangers Austen was thought to be stoic with a coolness of character, to her family she was spirited and delighted in amusing her loved ones with stories and witty jokes.

Additionally, Marianne's character is highly critical and quick to judge others. When speaking of Edward Ferrars, Marianne claims that Edward has "something wanting—his figure is not striking…. His eyes want all that spirit, that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence… he has no real taste" (*S&S* 20). Moreover, Marianne is highly critical of Colonel Brandon, stating Brandon "has neither genius, taste, nor spirit. That his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression" (*S&S* 61). These highly critical accounts are only two of the several judgements Marianne forms throughout the novel. Comparably, as can be seen in the letters she writes to Cassandra, Austen was also known to be critical and judgmental. For example, in one letter, Austen critiques Miss Mary Pearson, who later married Austen's brother Henry, stating, "If Miss Pearson should return with me, pray be careful not to expect too much Beauty. I will not pretend to say that on a first veiw [sic], she quite answered the opinion I had formed of her.—My Mother I am sure will be disappointed, if she does not take great care. From what I remember of her picture, it is no great resemblance."[20] Later in her letter, Austen writes, "Donot let the Lloyds go on any account before I return, unless Miss P—is of the party. How ill I have written. I begin to hate myself."[21] Much like Marianne, Austen was sometimes judgmental and harsh, and while she playfully chastised herself at the end of her letter, Austen did not attempt to repress this trait around her family.

---

[19] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen,* 86.
[20] Jane Austen, "Sunday 18 September 1796," *Jane Austen's Letters,* ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 12.
[21] Ibid., 13.

Furthermore, while not a self-proclaimed feminist, Austen is highly regarded as having feminist ideals. According to Margaret Kirkham, Austen's "development in thought and fiction…deserves to be called *feminist* since [her novels were] concerned with establishing moral equality of men and women and the proper status of individual women as accountable beings."[22] In addition to exploring different parts of her personality through the characters of Elinor and Marianne, Austen also used the Dashwood sisters to investigate her proto-feminist characteristics that she could not live out during the eighteenth century.

Although regarded as a genteel and proper lady due to her meek demeanor, various parts of Elinor Dashwood's personality break the mold of the "stereotypical eighteenth century woman."[23] During this time period, women were generally thought to be emotional beings. Vivien Jones identifies the "dominant eighteenth-century ideology of femininity" as "the natural association between women and the private sphere, domesticity and leisure… and the identification of women with feeling and sensibility rather than reason."[24] Contrastingly, men were exemplified as the more rational beings who could regulate and repress their emotions. Nevertheless, Elinor Dashwood embodies this stereotypically "masculine" quality through her ability to repress her feelings. Elinor practically makes herself ill by repressing her emotions after she finds out that the man she loves, Edward Ferrars, is betrothed to another woman. Rather than express her desolation and surprise at the news, Elinor internalizes her emotions and attempts to provide a rational explanation for Edward's deceit. Only two hours after "she had

---

[22] Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), 1.

[23] Jane Austen wrote the novel in the eighteenth century; however, Austen published *Sense and Sensibility* in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, I will be comparing Elinor and Marianne to women in the eighteenth century.

[24] Vivien Jones, Women in the Eighteenth Century (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 1990), accessed April 6, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/lib/utxa/reader.action?docID=178290&ppg=8.

first suffered the extinction of all her dearest hopes, no one would have supposed…that Elinor was mourning in secret over obstacles which must divide her for ever from the object of her love…" (*S&S* 161). Rather than to succumb to sentimentality, Elinor clings to rational thought.

Additionally, during Austen's time, men were the financial advisors of the family while the women were to take care of the home. Nonetheless, Elinor is the chief advisor, both financially and personally, for her family. With a "strength of understanding, and a coolness of judgement" Elinor is said "to be the counsellor of her mother" who balances her sister and mother's imprudence (*S&S* 7). Elinor's sensible and intellectual nature parallels that of Austen, who, according to J.E. Austen-Leigh, was a "judicious adviser" and had "strong foundations of sound sense and judgement" and a "rectitude of principle."[25] This parallel is echoed by Moreland Perkins who writes that "Austen endowed [Elinor] with enough habits and powers of thought belonging to Austen herself to qualify Elinor also as an intellectual…."[26] This characteristic may have been considered a "masculine" characteristic and goes against the grain of eighteenth century societal norms; nonetheless, Elinor reconciles her lady-like manners with an intellect that rivals men.

Although Elinor breaks the stereotypical mold of the eighteenth-century woman, Austen depicts Elinor as a heroine. This description suggests that Elinor's reserved demeanor and intellectual nature were seen as admirable and highlighted as strengths by Austen. By exploring Elinor's stereotype-defying characteristics, Austen accepts and even embraces her own rationality and intellect.

---

[25] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 94.

[26] Moreland Perkins, *Reshaping the Sexes in Sense and Sensibility* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1998), 13.

Moreover, Austen embodies and vicariously lives out some of her proto-feminist ideals through Marianne's rebellious nature. While Elinor deviates from eighteenth-century social norms through her "masculine," more reserved qualities, Marianne diverges from the stereotypical eighteenth century woman through her imprudent nature. Although Elinor is highly emotional, she attempts to mask these feelings through her reserved, yet agreeable nature; however, Marianne does not generally attempt to mask or repress her emotions and allows her feelings to guide her actions. Through her relationship with Willoughby, Marianne's character "most strikingly breaks the gender mold in her courtship behavior."[27] Upon first meeting Willoughby, Marianne is almost instantly infatuated with Willoughby and does not attempt to hide her flirtatious nature and apparent feelings. Even Elinor desires for Marianne to be more discrete in her affections, repeatedly venturing "to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne" (*S&S* 63).

Nevertheless, Marianne refuses to heed Elinor's protests. Instead, Marianne accompanies Willoughby to his future estate. When Elinor confronts Marianne for her impropriety, Marianne dismisses the charge, stating, "…if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure" (*S&S* 80). Additionally, after Willoughby vanishes from her life, Marianne seeks understanding by writing Willoughby several letters, pleading for him to explain himself. During the eighteenth century, writing letters to an eligible bachelor was synonymous with being betrothed. It was considered improper for a single man and woman to correspond without their being engaged. Nevertheless, Marianne defies this social norm and willingly pursues the man she loves. As supported by Perkins, "Marianne rejects many

[27] Ibid., 9.

of the rules prescribed by the socially constructed concept of the feminine in favor of what she believes to be within an individual woman's power: to define for herself the decorum suited to her gender."[28]

Nonetheless, although not as imprudent as Marianne, as a young woman, Austen was known for "speaking affectedly, and flirting conspicuously."[29] In a letter to Cassandra, Austen details her flirtatious relationship with an "Irish friend," who is most likely Tom Lefroy. Austen met Tom Lefroy at several Christmas balls during his stay at Ashe, and their "attraction seems to have been immediate."[30] Austen became infatuated with Lefroy, detailing their flirtations to Cassandra and laughing off Cassandra's warning to "be more restrained in her behavior."[31] Austen's flirtatious acquaintance with Lefroy, though her letters suggest she possessed strong feelings for him, continued until Tom left for London to study law and eventually Ireland, most likely at the behest of his family who desired for Tom to secure an advantageous marriage.[32]

Within the aforementioned letter to Cassandra, Austen divulged, "I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together."[33] While the letter does not contain specifics of what occurred at the dance, one can assume that in this particular situation Austen teetered the line on what was deemed as socially acceptable behavior.

Though Austen's letters to Cassandra regarding Lefroy may have been dramatized, Austen's somewhat rebellious, flirtatious behavior appears to be driven by the feelings of having

---

[28] Ibid.
[29] Marilyn Butler, "Austen, Jane (1775-1817)."
[30] Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2003), 95.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 110.
[33] Jane Austen, "Saturday 9-Sunday 10 January 1796," in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 1.

a first love. Marianne's behavior towards her relationship with Willoughby is more rebellious than Austen's flirtation with her "Irish friend;" nonetheless, Marianne echoes Austen's belief that women should have the right to pursue whomever and act however they desire. Marianne allowed Austen to live vicariously through her character and live out her more rebellious qualities in terms of love and openly shown emotions.

However, Marianne is not purely an embodiment of Austen's proto-feminist ideals as she is also a highly emotional being. When Willoughby abruptly leaves Barton Cottage, Marianne is broken-hearted and hysterical. While at first she is unable to talk or "unwilling to take any nourishment," soon Marianne spends "whole hours at the piano-forte, alternately singing and crying, her voice often totally suspended by her tears" (*S&S* 96). Marianne's fits of hysteria parallel the stereotypical idea that women were emotional beings who could not help but express their feelings. Although Marianne's character diverges from many eighteenth century feminine stereotypes, her personality aligns with a common idea of femininity during Austen's time.

While both Elinor and Marianne Dashwood break the mold of the stereotypical eighteenth century woman, each character serves a different purpose for Austen. Elinor Dashwood allowed Austen to embrace a part of her personality that she believed was less desirable than other parts of her identity. Contrastingly, Marianne enabled Austen to live out an aspect of her life that she could not dare embrace without disgracing her as well as her family's reputation. Nonetheless, whether through reserved façades or rebellious inclinations, both characters function as fictional representations of Austen's identity.

Through the characters of Elinor and Marianne, one sees a dichotomy between Austen's external and internal self. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen separates these two aspects of her identity in an effort to come to terms with her warring personalities. Conversely, Austen

reconciles the two aspects of her personality by embodying them in the character of Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. When confronted with strangers, Darcy asserts that he does not possess the talent of conversing easily with those whom he is not well-acquainted, stating, "I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns as I often see done."[34] Austen possessed a similar disposition as noted by Frank Austen who states, "…[Austen was] rather reserved to strangers so as to have been by some accused of hautiness of manner...."[35] Whether due to a lack of desire to engage in small talk or an inherent inability to converse with strangers, much like Austen, Mr. Darcy is socially awkward and unable to connect with those he does not intimately know.

Nonetheless, although Mr. Darcy parallels Austen's reserved nature towards strangers, Mr. Darcy also embodies Austen's witty disposition and amiable spirit with individuals who know him well. Austen's disposition towards friends is again echoed by Frank Austen who writes, "…in the company of those [Jane] loved the native benevolence of her heart and kindness of her disposition were forcibly displayed."[36] In the novel, this notion is realized through Mr. Darcy's effortless banter with Mr. Bingley. Moreover, Mr. Darcy's clever sense of humor becomes more apparent through his, not always cordial, repartee with Elizabeth Bennet. However, as he becomes more comfortable with Elizabeth, his amiable personality and good-natured spirit surfaces.

Much like Mr. Darcy, Austen came alive around her friends and family; however, when confronted with outsiders she would recede into herself. Nevertheless, through the development

---

[34] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 197. From this point forward will be cited in-text as "*P&P*."

[35] William Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 274.

[36] Ibid.

of Mr. Darcy, Austen integrates her two distinct personalities. In doing so, she creates a character who can be both stoic and reserved while also witty and agreeable, critical and cynical while also loveable and admirable.

Exploring a Specific Life Choice and its Alternative: *Pride and Prejudice*

Austen was an emotional, charismatic, somewhat rebellious being, but she was also keen, rational, and reserved. While the characters of *Sense and Sensibility* convey how Austen explores and embraces these seemingly diverging characteristics, her most well-known novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, displays how the author continually struggled with this internal battle throughout her life. Austen's internal skirmish between emotion and reason spills over from *Sense and Sensibility* into *Pride and Prejudice* through her representations of Mr. Collins, Charlotte Lucas, and Elizabeth Bennet. Through the intertwined relationships of the three characters, Austen writes about a specific life event that greatly impacted and defined her life. Through her characters, Austen dramatizes both possibilities of this event to help her come to terms with her decision. Nevertheless, before analyzing each of the characters, one must first set the stage of the life event with which Austen is seemingly grappling.

At the age of 27, Austen received a marriage proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither, a man who was "very plain in person – awkward & even uncouth in manner—nothing but size to recommend him."[37] Bigg-Wither's proposal came with the economic prospects of acquiring an estate, Manydown, as well as a fortune, while also allowing Austen to provide for her family; however, Austen did not possess any romantic feelings for Bigg-Wither. Within this one decision, Austen faces a choice between sense and sensibility. Although at first Austen accepted Bigg-Wither's proposal, by the next morning she recanted her acceptance and fled Manydown

[37] David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 258.

with her sister, Cassandra. While there has been speculation as to what happened during the night to cause Austen to change her mind, it seems as though she believed that a marriage without love was not worth the safety of economy. This idea is echoed in Austen's letter to her niece, Fanny Knight, when Austen advises Fanny:

> Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor—which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony… Well, I shall say, as I have often said before, Donot be in a hurry; depend upon it, the right Man will come at last; you will in the course of the next two to three years, meet with somebody more generally unexceptionable than anyone you have yet know, who will love you as warmly as ever He did, & who will so completely attach you, that you will feel you never really loved before.[38]

Austen discourages Fanny Knight from accepting a proposal from a man who did not seem to love her, because economic security is not worth sacrificing love. Thus, while we do not unequivocally know why Austen fled Manydown, this letter seemingly provides insight into Austen's reasoning for rejecting Bigg-Wither's proposal. Ultimately, "the place and fortune which would certainly be [Bigg-Wither's], could not alter the man."[39]

I argue that to reconcile her decision to reject Bigg-Wither, Austen vicariously lives out both facets of her decision through Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas.[40] Readers who have read *Pride and Prejudice* are familiar with the comical event of Mr. Collins asking Elizabeth Bennet for her hand in marriage. Whether reading the novel or watching the film adaptation, the

---

[38] Jane Austen, "Thursday 13 March 1817," *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 347.

[39] David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life*, 256.

[40] Although Bigg-Wither's proposal to Austen comes to fruition after Jane first wrote *Pride and Prejudice* (then named *First Impressions*) in 1797, the novel was not published until 1813, 16 years later. During this time, Austen made copious edits to the novel, even changing the title. Due to the extensive edits Austen made during this gap, it is extremely plausible that many of her revisions were infused with her self-reflection and life experiences.

audience feels the palpable tension in the room that is juxtaposed by the absurdity of Mr. Collins' character. Like Bigg-Wither, Mr. Collins is socially awkward, "a tall, heavy-looking young man of five and twenty. His air was grave and stately, and his manners were very formal" (*P&P* 72). Mr. Collins, with his attractive economic prospects yet lack of social graces, provides Elizabeth with the opportunity to keep Longbourn in the family, relieving the fear of what was to come of the family once Mr. Bennet dies, and to escape the possibility of spinsterhood.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth repeatedly refuses Collins' proposal, stating, "I am perfectly serious in my refusal.—You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so" (*P&P* 120). While Elizabeth's mother was shocked by Elizabeth's refusal to marry Mr. Collins, modern audiences could not fault her for her choice of love over economy. Nevertheless, in Austen's time, to reject a proposal with the prospects Mr. Collins afforded was seen by some as reckless. At the age of 27, Austen had no foreseeable suitors at the time of Bigg-Wither's proposal, and it seemed unlikely that she would receive another offer. Similarly, Mr. Collins warns Elizabeth that it is "by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made" to her due to the fact that her "portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the affects of [her] loveliness and amiable qualifications" (*P&P* 122). Nonetheless, like Austen, Elizabeth cannot reconcile herself to marrying for wealth rather than love. Both Austen and Elizabeth Bennet reason that it is better to become a spinster and remain with family rather than forfeit the heart and body for the security of economy.

However, while Elizabeth walks a path similar to Austen's, Charlotte Lucas chooses economy over love by accepting Collins' proposal. By creating the character of Charlotte Lucas, Austen explores what her life could have been had she not recanted her acceptance of Bigg-

Wither's proposal. At the age of 27, the same age Austen was when she received the proposal, Charlotte Lucas faces the likely possibility of spinsterhood. With little money and no prospects, Charlotte seems destined to be a burden on her family forever. Rather than shy away from Mr. Collins' advances as Elizabeth repeatedly does, Charlotte welcomes and even encourages Mr. Collins' affections until he eventually makes a proposal that she readily accepts.

An engagement to Mr. Collins based on affection seems utterly fantastical; nevertheless, as many marriages during the nineteenth century were, Mr. Collins and Charlotte's engagement represents a means to an end rather than a vow of love. Collins attempts to secure a wife because he thinks "it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances…to set the example of matrimony in his parish…" (*P&P* 118). Collins desires a wife, not for love, but for two pragmatic reasons: he as well as society believes a man in his position should be married, and his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, insists that he find a suitable wife (*P&P* 118). Additionally, Charlotte Lucas is practical and methodical, accepting Collins "solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (*P&P* 137) as marriage "was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune" (*P&P* 138). Unlike Elizabeth, Charlotte would rather have a comfortable home and escape the shame of living the rest of her life as an old maid than attempt to wait for love to come along.

Creating Elizabeth and Charlotte allowed Austen to reflect on her choice to not wed Bigg-Wither. Moreover, by writing about each path she could have taken, Austen conveys her mindset when making the decision to reject Bigg-Wither's proposal. While Austen's heroine, Elizabeth, goes on to find incandescent love with Mr. Darcy, Austen's depiction of Charlotte suggests that Austen believed she may not have been completely unhappy had she married Bigg-Wither.

Charlotte, rational and practical, represents the portion of Austen that understands her obligations as a daughter and desires to not become a burden to her family. As many women during this time married for economical rather than romantic reasons, it was not only encouraged but expected that Austen find a suitable match with economic prospects and accept a reasonable offer of marriage such as the proposal from Bigg-Wither. Charlotte, who symbolizes Austen's more pragmatic, unsentimental self, assumes these obligations by accepting Collins' proposal, stating, "I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's characters, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state." (*P&P* 140). As previously discussed, had Austen married Bigg-Wither, she would have been able to provide for her family and keep Longbourn in the family, both desirable aspects for a woman in her position.

In Charlotte's case, marrying Mr. Collins has many advantages and prospects. When Elizabeth visits Hunsford "after Charlotte is settled into married life, she is pleased to see her old friend taking satisfaction in her pleasant establishment while wisely encouraging Mr. Collins to work in his garden and leave her to the enjoyment of their comfortable home."[41] Charlotte has a nice home that she can enjoy as "lady of the house," and she and Mr. Collins coexist peacefully. Moreover, after Mr. Bennet dies, she will move into Elizabeth's current home at Longbourn as Mr. Collins is next to inherit the estate. The idea that Charlotte believes she can be content with Collins seemingly conveys that Austen, had she been able to sacrifice the sentimental part of her

[41] Ruth Perry, "Sleeping with Mr. Collins, (Conference Papers)," in *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 22 (2000): 119. Literature Resource Center, accessed April 5, 2017, http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=txshracd2598&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA80370746&asid=e03afae356a82a6ba706f467b34bb901.

nature, could have also been satisfied with her marriage to Bigg-Wither. By choosing Bigg-Wither, Austen would have forfeited emotional and romantic contentment for economic security.

Moreover, Austen further divulges her feelings towards her decision when Elizabeth hears of Mr. Collins and Charlotte's engagement. Elizabeth, distressed upon hearing the news, notes that "she had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (*P&P* 141). Elizabeth is confused by Charlotte's acceptance. Additionally, Elizabeth's feelings towards the engagement are further complicated as she must seem happy for her friend's engagement while she processes the fact that she had been proposed to by the same man shortly before. While Elizabeth understands Charlotte's position, she cannot understand how Charlotte could forfeit sentiment for sense. To see her beloved friend engaged to a man she did not love added to "the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen" (*P&P* 141). However, Austen's depiction of Charlotte suggests that she in fact does find contentment in her marriage, simply not romantic contentment. Nonetheless, Elizabeth, who represents Austen's more emotional self, conveys Austen's feelings that a marriage without love, even if it contains other worldly advantages, cannot make a person fully content.

Interestingly, Austen never receives another offer of marriage, Elizabeth Bennet is proposed to by Mr. Darcy and *rejects* his first offer. While many can understand why Elizabeth would reject Mr. Collins, it is seemingly more difficulty to ascertain why she would reject handsome, rich, well-respected Mr. Darcy. Nonetheless, the decisive difference between Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy may lie within her reasons for rejection. In Mr. Collin's case, Elizabeth rejects the proposal because she does not possess, nor will she ever

possess, any romantic feelings for Collins; however, in rejecting Mr. Darcy, her primary reason for rejection seems to be the fact that Darcy impeded Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley's relationship. Because Darcy's actions lead to Jane being brokenhearted, Elizabeth cannot reconcile to herself marrying a man she holds responsible for her sister's pain. When Darcy rectifies Jane and Bingley's relationship as well as helps find Lydia Bennet and Wickham, Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy's changes for the better, and she allows herself to open her heart to love.

Austen ends the analysis of her decision through her representation of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's romance. By allowing Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet to find their "happily ever after," Austen conveys her acceptance of her choice to reject Bigg-Wither. Although Austen remains a spinster for the rest of her life after withdrawing her acceptance of the proposal, her heroine, and the person she most identifies with in the novel, finds true love and economy through her relationship with Mr. Darcy. Austen, at the age of 27, did not have a large window of time to find another match; however, Elizabeth, who is 21 in the novel, still has time to find both love and economy. By refusing to sacrifice romance for security, Elizabeth eventually finds her "perfect match." While Austen did not receive this same love in reality, by writing this relationship into Elizabeth's story, she affirms that Elizabeth was correct in her refusal to marry Mr. Collins.

Exploring What Could Have Been: *Persuasion*

At the time of writing *Persuasion*, Austen had not only lost the only man she ever seemingly loved, Tom Lefroy, she had also refused the proposal of Harris Bigg-Wither. Written towards the end of Austen's life, *Persuasion* represents Austen's nostalgic representation of what her life could have been. Unlike in *Pride and Prejudice* where Austen comes to terms with a

decision by analyzing two circumstances, in *Persuasion* Austen writes an entirely different scenario for her life to explore what she may have wished would have come to fruition in her life. As seen in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen had seemingly lived in a perpetual state of emotional warfare between who she was and how she presented herself to the public. Through the characters of Anne Elliot and Mrs. Croft, Austen seems to explore a life that would have enabled her to live free from the constraints of society in which she lived.

Before delving into the analysis of Anne Elliot and Mrs. Croft, one must understand Austen's focus on the Navy as well as her comprehensive knowledge of the Royal Navy. *Persuasion* begins in the summer of 1814[42], towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars. This particular setting is significant due to the fact that both of Austen's brothers, Francis and Charles Austen, were naval officers who fought "throughout the length of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars."[43] The Austen brothers' naval experiences opened Jane Austen's eyes to an entirely different world as she frequently visited her brothers, becoming acquainted with their naval friends "in London and in Bath, a gathering-ground for retired Admirals and for Captains and junior officers home on leave or on half pay between ships."[44] Through her close relationships with her brothers as well as her friendships with a myriad of naval officers, Jane Austen accumulated much knowledge regarding the structure and mechanics of the Royal Navy.

More importantly to this thesis, however, Austen learned about the inner and outer workings of a sailor's life with respect to marriage. Both Francis and Charles were married while serving in the Royal Navy. Moreover, Austen lived with Francis and his wife, Mary, in Southampton between 1807 and 1809, which provided Austen with a first-hand account on what

---

[42] Jane Austen, *Persuasion,* ed. Antje Blank and Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9. From this point forward will be cited in-text as "*P.*"

[43] Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy* (New York: Hambledon and London Ltd, 2000), 1.

[44] Ibid., 4.

it was like to be married to a naval officer.[45] Marilyn Butler asserts that the marriage of Admiral and Mrs. Croft is likened to an idealized version of Francis's marriage to Mary Gibson.[46] Additionally, Fanny Austen, Charles wife, lived with Charles and their two children aboard the *Namur* for a period of time.[47] This living arrangement is similar to that of Admiral and Mrs. Croft as the admiral's wife frequently accompanied her husband at sea. The knowledge Austen accumulated regarding the Royal Navy as well as what it meant to be a "sailor's wife" no doubt influenced her depiction of Mrs. Croft as will be discussed later in this section. By setting *Persuasion* in maritime England and focusing on the life of naval officers, Austen sets the stage for Anne Elliot to become the ideal naval wife that Austen may have wished to be, but never became.

Mrs. Croft and Anne Elliot serve as representations of different facets of Austen's identity. Anne Elliot seems to symbolize the part of Austen that most closely aligns with her reality while Mrs. Croft seemingly represents who Austen ideally wished to be. As the novel begins, both Austen and Elliot have rejected an opportunity for marriage: Austen with Bigg-Wither and Elliot with Captain Wentworth. While *Pride and Prejudice* ends with Elizabeth Bennet falling in love with Mr. Darcy after refusing Mr. Collins' proposal, *Persuasion* seems to better parallel Austen's actual life by beginning after Anne Elliot refuses Wentworth's proposal and has reached an age where spinsterhood seems inevitable. Through the creation of Anne Elliot, Austen not only writes about the continual attempt to accept both her "feminine" and "unfeminine" characteristics, the author also creates a heroine who embraces both parts of

[45] Marilyn Butler, "Austen, Jane (1775-1817).
[46] Ibid.
[47] Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*, 64.

herself, is ultimately accepted for her entire self, and obtains a life where the feminine and the unfeminine can coexist harmoniously.

As previously discussed, Elinor Dashwood's gentle demeanor and genteel nature parallels many characteristics deemed as "feminine;" however, Elinor also contains many characteristics that diverge from what society thought to be "feminine" as Elinor embodies Jane Austen's external, more rational self. Similarly, Anne Elliot contains both "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics; however, in *Persuasion* Anne Elliot more openly embraces these characteristics. Additionally, Anne Elliot sheds light on Austen's proto-feminist ideals through her actions and speech.

Anne Elliot, with an "elegance of mind and sweetness of manner," (*P* 6) embodies many characteristics deemed as "feminine" in the eighteenth century; however, Anne is also reserved, constantly overshadowed by her vain family members. Like Elinor Dashwood, Anne continually represses her emotions, hiding them away from those with whom she is not close. For example, after Anne encounters her long-lost love, Captain Wentworth, Anne is overcome with emotion, thinking to herself, "'It is over! It is over!' she repeated to herself again, and again, in nervous gratitude. Mary talked, but [Anne] could not attend. She had seen him. They had met. They had been once more in the same room! Soon, however, [Anne] began to reason with herself, and try to be feeling less" (*P* 64). Much like Austen, who conveyed a more reserved nature to the public, Anne Elliot feels the need to repress her emotions in the presence of her sister. Mary, Anne's sister with whom she is not close, cannot detect Anne's intense feelings. Moreover, Anne does not appear comfortable conveying her internal self to someone with whom she is not especially close. Rather than embrace all the warring emotions at the sight of Wentworth, which would

have been a more stereotypically "feminine" act, Anne diverges from this stereotype by using reason and logic to repress her feelings and preserve her reserved demeanor.

Nevertheless, Anne Elliot seems to differs from Austen in her lack of self-confidence. Austen's reserved, stoic side was not due to her inability to muster confidence. With those she was close with, Austen was lively, witty, and bursting with self-assurance; however, to those she did not know she put on a stoic face. Anne Elliot, who was not close with any of her family members, does not have an outlet to take down her reserved façade and build confidence; thus, "her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne" (*P* 6).

Nonetheless, similarly to Elinor Dashwood, Anne Elliot embodies Austen's "masculine" characteristics of rationality and sense. Austen, with her "strong foundations of sound sense and judgement"[48] infuses Anne Elliot with the "masculine" quality of principle and judiciousness. At the beginning of the novel, Anne serves as a financial advisor for her frivolous family, a stereotypically "masculine" position. When Lady Russell creates a plan to assist the Elliots with their debt, she consults Anne whose "every emendation…had been on the side of honesty over importance. [Anne] wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tome of indifference for every thing but justice and equity" (*P* 13). Anne is willing to sacrifice comfort for a prudent lifestyle and assists Lady Russell in making the "plans of economy" and "exact calculations" (*P* 13) in order to do so. Although her father desires to keep his title and riches, Anne's "actions are based on rational judgement

[48] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 94.

wedded to emotional maturity."[49] Anne feels an "indispensable duty" to her family to save them from their accumulating debt.[50]

Moreover, Anne Elliot represents Austen's proto-feminist ideal of rationality by serving as a personal advisor to Captain Benwick. Benwick, who has lost his love, is melancholy and reserved; however, he gravitates towards Anne and seeks solace in their conversations. Anne advises Benwick to expand his reading to literature beyond the romantic or tragic poems he had been consuming, and "Captain Benwick listened attentively, and seemed grateful for the interest implied…. [Benwick] noted down the names of those she recommended, and promised to procure and read them" (*P* 109). Anne counsels Benwick and "preach patience and resignation to a young man…" (*P* 109). Stereotypically, men would not seek or adhere to the advice of a woman as men were supposed to be more rational creatures; however, Anne's "finely discriminating sensibility and warmth of heart is matched with a sound head."[51] This scene demonstrates "that sense and sensibility are not properties of one sex or the other, nor are they mutually exclusive traits."[52] Anne exercises a masculine trait while maintaining her "feminine" quality of nurturing tendencies and warmth of heart.

Additionally, Anne Elliot continually proves to be a judicious advisor not simply to men, but to naval officers, who look to her for guidance when Louisa Musgrove leaps from the Cobb and falls unconscious. While Henrietta and Mary are inconsolable, Anne remains completely calm and rational, attempting to comfort the women. Taking charge of the situation, the scene

---

[49] Jeannie Sargent Judge, ""Persuasion," Feminism, and the New Psychology of Women: Anne Elliot's Constancy, Courage, and Creativity," in *Journal of Thought* 36, no. 2 (2001), http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/42590264.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, 151.

[52] Jeannie Sargent Judge, ""Persuasion," Feminism, and the New Psychology of Women: Anne Elliot's Constancy, Courage, and Creativity," 48.

seems to morph from the site of an accident to that of a battleground as Anne provides instructions to the men as to how they should resolve the situation. Anne assumes command over the naval officers as she not only gives orders to find a surgeon, she also stops Wentworth from "darting away" (*P* 119) and instead orders Captain Benwick to go since he would know where to find a doctor. Additionally, the remaining men—Charles Musgrove and Captain Wentworth—continue to look to Anne as Charles exclaims, "Anne, Anne… what is to be done next? In heaven's name, what is to be done next?" (*P* 120) This situation is significant because it places Anne Elliot in a leadership position on equal footing, if not above, men. While during the eighteenth century women were thought to be more emotional and prone to hysterics, in this scenario Austen depicts a woman with the sound judgement to lead men.

Lastly, not only does Anne advise Captain Benwick, she most openly embraces Austen's proto-feminist ideals when she challenges Captain Harville's assertion on the inconstancy of women. When Captain Harville claims that his sister Fanny would not have forgotten Captain Benwick as quickly as Benwick moved on from her, Anne agrees that constancy is women's fate, stating "We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. [Men] are forced on exertion. [Men] have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other…" (*P* 253). Anne Elliot incisively points out the fact that women were not afforded the same opportunity and experiences as men during this time; thus, although "man is more robust than woman… he is not longer-lived" (*P* 253).

Moreover, Captain Harville disagrees with the longevity of women's feelings compared to men, claiming, "I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy" (*P* 254). Nevertheless, Anne exclaims, "…please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has

been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing." (*P* 255). Anne's statement unveils Austen's proto-feminist belief that men have had the advantage of writing about the lives of both men and women due to their access to education, whereas women have been afforded no opportunity. [53] Additionally, because men have been provided with more access to education, they have controlled how history is written and presented to the public. Thus, men have controlled how women's lives have been depicted throughout history.

Although Anne Elliot's character signifies many of Austen's proto-feminist ideals and characteristics, Anne does not fully embrace these traits. Rather, readers see Anne's "masculine," qualities in flashes as Austen's proto-feminist beliefs are brought forth before retreating into the shadows of Anne's more feminine qualities. Like Austen, Anne could not fully embrace her "unfeminine" characteristics within the constraints of the society in which she lives. Instead, the reader only catches glimpses of Anne Elliot diverging from the feminine stereotype, just as Austen could only sparingly diverge from the constraints of eighteenth century society.

Nevertheless, through the character of Mrs. Croft, Austen depicts a woman who embodies all the proto-feminist ideals that she possessed but could not openly live out. By creating Mrs. Croft, Austen nostalgically writes about the life she would have ideally liked to have lived. Through her description of Mrs. Croft, Austen paints a portrait of the ideal naval wife:

> Mrs. Croft, though neither tall nor fat, had a squareness, uprightness, and vigour of form, which gave importance to her person. She had bright, dark eyes, good teeth, and altogether an agreeable face; though her reddened and weather-beaten complexion, the

[53] This idea echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) that women should have equal, universal access to education as men.

> consequence of her having been almost as much at seas as her husband, made her seem to have lived some years longer in the world than her real eight and thirty. Her manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself, and no doubts of what to do; without any approach to coarseness, however, or any want of good humour. (*P* 52)

Austen's depiction of Mrs. Croft seems to be a metaphor for a ship as all ships are named after women, and she uses words such as "weather-beaten," "squareness," and "uprightness." Additionally, Mrs. Croft defies the stereotypical ideals of beauty with her weathered complexion and solid physique rather than porcelain skin and fragile stature.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Croft is feminine and beautiful, yet her features and manners suggests that she is a woman of importance and sound judgement. Her "certainty, decisiveness, and self-confidence [establishes her] as a counter-figure to Anne, whose own future would have been very different if she had possessed the same qualities"[54] when she was persuaded to refuse Wentworth's proposal. As a woman who is eleven years older than Anne, Mrs. Croft's character symbolizes who Anne, and inadvertently Austen, would have been had she wedded a naval officer (in Anne's case, Captain Wentworth).

Additionally, while Anne Elliot defends the constancy of women, Mrs. Croft challenges the idea that women are fragile, irrational beings. When Mrs. Croft's brother, Captain Wentworth, claims that women are too delicate to live aboard a ship, Mrs. Croft balks at the idea, stating, "'Oh Frederick!—But I cannot believe it of you.—All idle refinement!—Women may be as comfortable on board, as in the best house in England" (*P* 74). Mrs. Croft refuses to accept that women are too frail to live in the same accommodations as men, and it is incorrect for men

[54] Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*, 274.

to think otherwise. Mrs. Croft continues to chastise her brother, exclaiming, "I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days" (*P* 75). Whereas stereotypically women were thought to be docile, dependent, and unable to act or think on their own[55], Mrs. Croft reasons that women are intelligent, resilient beings who do not need special treatment to live comfortably in the same conditions as men. By defending woman's rationality, Mrs. Croft rebels against the stereotypical idea that women were simply emotional rather than rational. Mrs. Croft refuses to accept Wentworth's notion that women are "fine" and weak rather than strong, steadfast, and sensible.

Lastly, due to her time at sea, Mrs. Croft has established herself as an equal among men. When Admiral Croft encounters an old friend during their time in town, Anne observes "their eagerness of conversation when occasionally forming into a little knot of the navy, Mrs. Croft looking as intelligent and keen as any of the officers around her" (*P* 183). By living at sea unconstrained from the norms of society, Mrs. Croft has become an equal to the men with whom she lived on the ship. Rather than receding into the shadows while the men talked, Mrs. Croft stands resolute and confident as essentially "one of the guys." Whereas women were stereotypically seen as unable to "act, to decide, to think,"[56] Mrs. Croft shows an equal amount of intelligence and wit as the naval officers surrounding her.

Through the character of Mrs. Croft, Austen creates a figure containing several qualities and ideals that diverged from eighteenth-century societal norms; however, these qualities do not signify that because Mrs. Croft diverges from many "feminine" traits, she is not loveable to the

---

[55] Jeannie Sargent Judge, ""Persuasion," Feminism, and the New Psychology of Women: Anne Elliot's Constancy, Courage, and Creativity," 44.

[56] Ibid.

other sex. While Mrs. Croft is intelligent, rational, and not stereotypically beautiful, she has a strong, emotional relationship with her husband, Admiral Croft, that is based on mutual love and emotional attachment. Mrs. Croft is deeply in love with her husband and longs to always be with him. In fact, she admits that the only time she has "ever really suffered in body and mind" and "fancied [herself] unwell" (*P* 76) was when she had to stay behind in Deal while Admiral Croft was at sea. While she diverges from stereotypical norms, Mrs. Croft's character does not completely forfeit the emotional nature of a woman. Mrs. Croft "corrects the caricature of the 'unsexed female', the woman who does not fit the sentimental ideal of femininity"[57] by unapologetically embracing the proto-feminist ideals that Jane Austen possessed but could not live out while not having to forfeit her "feminine" characteristics.

Both Mrs. Croft and Anne Elliot exemplify Austen's proto-feminist beliefs. However, Anne Elliot signifies the part of Austen's self who only partially embraces these characteristics while Mrs. Croft is the ideal version of Austen's self, the person who is able to fully live out these ideals. The difference between Anne Elliot's partial embrace versus Mrs. Croft's full embrace lies within the Admiral and Mrs. Croft's marriage. Although during this time men were considered the superior beings within a marriage, Admiral and Mrs. Croft's marriage suggests a partnership based on mutual respect. This idea can be seen in the way Admiral and Mrs. Croft drive their carriage. When it seems as though the Crofts are in danger of hitting a post, Mrs. Croft "coolly [gave] the reigns a better direction herself, and they happily passed the danger" (*P* 99). Admiral and Mrs. Croft share the reigns of the carriage in order to deposit Anne safely home. Their style of driving suggests that the Crofts see themselves on equal footing, and their marriage is a partnership rather than one person depending on the other completely. Admiral

[57] Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, 153.

Croft enables Mrs. Croft to be his equal and embraces her independent nature. The Croft's marriage has "qualities which Anne not only admires but feels that she can enter into and enjoy"[58] through her rekindled romance with Wentworth.

At the end of the novel, Anne Elliot regains her lost love and is set to become an ideal naval wife like Mrs. Croft. A life with Wentworth will allow Anne to be an equal to her partner and finally embrace who she really is. By remaining single and living forever with her family, Anne would never have been able to break free from the societal constraints imposed by the land of gentry. Similarly, Austen understood she could not fully live out her proto-feminist ideals without shaming her family. Thus, Austen creates Mrs. Croft so she may vicariously live through her character and embrace all her proto-feminist ideals. Additionally, Austen creates a heroine who, unlike herself, finds the love of a man who will allow her to be his equal.

However, the last sentence in *Persuasion* warns that although Anne "gloried in being a sailor's wife… she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance" (*P* 275). Austen notes that while Anne will be free from her current societal constraints, she will enter another society, that of the Royal Navy, that contains its own societal restrictions. Nevertheless, Austen appears to acknowledge this notion, yet she believes she might have been happier under the societal constraints of "being a naval wife" rather than the ones imposed by the land of gentry.

While Anne Elliot secures the love of her life and is set up to become an ideal naval wife, Jane Austen eventually dies a spinster. Through her depiction of Anne Elliot, Jane Austen writes "a story that embodies the novelist's fantasy of fulfillment in love, a salvation of spinsterhood, in

[58] Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*, 292.

short, Jane Austen's own life salvaged and set right by a naval officer."[59] By creating these two characters who are infused with her proto-feminist ideals and characteristics, Jane Austen is able to not only re-write the ending of her own life through the life of Anne Elliot's, she is also able to explore what her life could have been and vicariously live out this alternate life through the character of Mrs. Croft.

[59] Ibid., 297.

Chapter II: Identifying Invisible Presences: Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf once wrote that "invisible presences" are like "magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that," and "it is by such invisible presences that the 'subject of this memoir' is tugged this way and that every day of his life; it is they that keep him in position."[60] Although Woolf is known for writing in several genres such as the short story, novel, essay, and biography, her autobiographical works seemingly attempt to identify and understand the "invisible presences" that shaped Woolf's own sense of self. These "invisible presences" equate to undetectable forces that influence a person's identity. Throughout her life, Woolf struggled with depression. Not only did Woolf feel as if she were an outsider who "was too intellectual and unconventional to feel at ease"[61] in Victorian society, but a traumatic childhood and strained relationships with her elusive mother and overbearing father also contributed to her feeling of alienation and depression. Writing about and reflecting on her past experiences from childhood through adulthood seems to have served as a type of catharsis for Woolf that allowed her to seek understanding of and closure with her past.

Woolf primarily wrote about her experiences through two genres: fiction and memoir. Unlike Austen who never admits that her fictional works may be based on her actual life, Woolf openly confirms that various novels such as *To the Lighthouse* (1928) are autobiographical.[62] Nevertheless, the focus of this chapter is not to repeat the method of analysis in the preceding

---

[60] Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1985), 80. The 2nd edition of *Moments of Being* includes added pages in "A Sketch of the Past." The added pages are 107 to 125.

[61] Lyndall Gordon, "Woolf, (Adeline) Virginia (1882–1941)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: OUP, 2005), online ed., edited by David Cannadine, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/article/37018.

[62] Virginia Woolf, "Introduction," in *Moments of Being*, 13.

chapter by analyzing how the author wrote about her life through her fictional characters. Rather, this chapter examines Woolf's autobiographical works that she never published: her memoirs. In these works, the author partially writes in a stream of consciousness style, a more unfiltered and unfettered form of writing which enabled her to identify various "moments of being" and "invisible presences" that affected her life.

While Austen scattered various parts of her identity throughout her fictional characters, this chapter examines how Woolf creates a more integrated identity through the use of memoirs as she explores past experiences that molded her personal sense of self. Moreover, the section considers reasons why Woolf did not wish to publish any of her memoirs; nevertheless, her memoirs were eventually published posthumously. This chapter analyzes Woolf's autobiographical tendencies through three sections: "Warrior for Women Writers: *A Room of One's Own*," "The Memoir Club: Filtered Snapshots of Woolf," and "Invisible Presences: "A Sketch of the Past."

Warrior for Women Writers: *A Room of One's Own*

Before delving into Woolf's autobiographical writings, it is important to note her advocacy for women writing. *A Room of One's Own* was originally given as two lectures at Newnham and Girton Colleges, both Cambridge colleges for women, as an attempt to inspire the young women to write; later, Woolf expanded and revised the lectures and published them as a single work in 1929 (*Room* vii). During this time, as Mary Gibson observes in the foreword to *A Room of One's Own*, feminist writing "was so little in vogue as to be effectively moribund, when the Feminist Movement, connected as it had come to be almost exclusively with female suffrage, considered its work finished" (*Room* vii). After women were granted the right to vote, a sharp decline in feminist writing occurred as many women believed that the "Feminist Movement" was

equivalent to women's suffrage rather than gender equality. Nevertheless, within this work Woolf directly addresses the disparity between the number of men and women writers and attempts to illuminate the reasons for this discrepancy. In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf explores the underlying reasons why women during this time had difficulty writing as well as outlines what is necessary for women to discover their creative genius.

Within this work, Woolf attempts to answer two questions: why women are poor and why so few women have written. Woolf asserts that women's genius is constantly restrained by both men's overwhelming domination over women and women's social position. First, let us consider men's dominance over women. During this time, men were still regarded as the superior sex. Not only were women thought to be physically weaker, but another popular belief is echoed by Oscar Browning, who declared that "the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man" (*Room* 53). This idea permeated Victorian society and beyond, bolstering men's sense of intellectual and physical supremacy over women.

Woolf writes, "Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (*Room* 35). She argues that men, who dominated literature and continually wrote about life as women (although they could not have the faintest idea of what this experience entails), stifled women's genius so men might remain superior. For if a woman begins to write her own stories, if "she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished" (*Room* 36). Thus, men continued to assert their authority by undermining and criticizing women writers. Rather than encourage women to write, whether fiction, poetry, or other, "the world did not say to [woman] as it said to [him] Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?" (*Room* 52) Thus, Woolf

contends that women continually internalized their intellectual inferiority to men and felt as if they had no place as writers.

Additionally, Woolf asserts that so few women wrote due to their position in Victorian and Edwardian society. During the early twentieth century, women of the middle and upper classes were still primarily placed in the domestic, or private sphere. Within the domestic sphere, women were "kept busy at home with their assigned duties of raising children" and "provisioning and ordering the house."[63] Because women were confined to the domestic sphere, they were unable to uninhibitedly explore their creative genius.

Woolf exhibits the idea of wasted genius through her famous anecdote of Shakespeare's gifted, fictional sister, Judith. While Judith is "as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was," she was not sent to school and had "no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil" (*Room* 47). Women during the twentieth century had limited access to educational pursuits and even fewer opportunities for worldly experiences. Rather than hone their creative genius and become intellectually equal to men, women such as Judith were told to "mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about books and papers" (*Room* 47). With sparse access to education, women could not learn the skills to make their own living. Therefore, women found no opportunity to write, and if they did, that writing was laced with an anger, a bitterness at their position and lack of personal fortune. Rather than exploring or writing and focusing on the material itself, women fixated on what they did not possess and this

[63] Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1660-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?*, 30. While his book details the idea of separate spheres until the mid-19th century, the idea of separate spheres seems to permeate late 19th century and early 20th century society. Additionally, this idea did not extend to working class women as these women were out in the public sphere and were not kept in the domestic sphere. Women of the working class were usually illiterate and did not have the means or the education to write about their lives. Once women had universal access to education and women's positions improved, more women were placed in a position that enabled them to write about their lives.

anger seeped through into their writing. Women's creative genius was restrained and suppressed by gender constraints, and with this limitation, their creative genius withered away.

Nevertheless, Woolf urges women to break this cycle and advocates for women to actively explore their creative genius. Woolf claims that "women must have money and privacy in order to write," and she believes, "Genius needs freedom; it cannot flower if it is encumbered by fear, or rancor, or dependency, and without money freedom is impossible. And the money cannot be earned; it must come to the writer in the form of a windfall or a legacy, or it will bring with it attachments, obligations" (*Room* viii). By securing a livelihood of at least five hundred pounds a year and a "room of one's own," women would be liberated from societal and gender constraints and might hone their craft without bitterness about their position.

While the lectures served to primarily address women and fiction, Woolf advocates for women to write openly and candidly through any genre, noting, "Therefore I would ask you to write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or however vast…. For I am by no means confining you to fiction. If you would please me—and there are thousands like me—you would write books of travel and adventure, and research and scholarship, and history and biography, and criticism and philosophy and science" (*Room* 109). Woolf enumerates the plethora of genres in which women can write, and encourages women to explore whichever genre she chooses. Living out this principle, Woolf dabbled in several genres from fiction to biography.

Nevertheless, how, readers may ask, do Woolf's ideas in *A Room of One's Own* relate to the idea of the evolution of women's autobiographical tendencies? While it is well-known that Woolf was an advocate for increasing the number of women writers in the twentieth century, it is interesting to note that Woolf's most intimate writing, her memoirs, were not published until

1976 in *Moments of Being*, over thirty years after her death. Urging women to write, Woolf, who published short stories, essays, biographies, and novels, seemingly could not bring herself to publish her autobiographical writings. However, an exploration of the memoirs Woolf kept from the public eye may shed light on her reasons to refrain from publishing her autobiographical works.

The Memoir Club: Filtered Snapshots of Woolf

Woolf seems to have constructed two types of memoir: the memoirs she presented to the Bloomsbury Group, or a subsection of the group known as the Memoir Club, and the autobiographical writing she kept private. While both styles of memoir served as a cathartic outlet for Woolf, each category of memoir represents a different representation of the author. The writings introduced to the Memoir Club[64] signifies "filtered snapshots" of Woolf's life. Through these glimpses into her life, Woolf and others began to forge the path to encourage not only women writers, but artists in general, to write and share about their lives.

The Memoir Club, which originated in 1920, was a group of artist friends who came together to bond over "shared past experiences."[65] According to Leonard Woolf, Virginia Woolf's husband, the original group was comprised of him and his wife, Vanessa and Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, E.M. Forster, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Adrian Stephen, and Desmond and Mary MacCarthy.[66] Providing a safe space for the friends to explore and discuss their autobiographical writing, this group of intellectuals

---

[64] I will primarily be pulling from her memoirs "Am I a Snob" and "22 Hyde Park Gate" that she presented to the Memoir Club, yet the overarching idea regarding form and structure permeates through her other memoirs that she presented to the group.

[65] S.P. Rosenbaum, *Victorian Bloomsbury: Volume 1: The Early History of the Bloomsbury Group* Victorian Bloomsbury, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1987), 4.

[66] Ibid, 4.

demanded absolute candor from its members.[67] The Memoir Club is significant in that the group provided an opportunity for both *men and women* to come together and share their ideas, writing, and art.

Virginia Woolf presented several memoirs to the club, namely "Am I a Snob," "Old Bloomsbury," and "22 Hyde Park Gate," all of which were published posthumously. Unlike Austen who seemingly wrote about her life through her fictional characters, by openly writing about her past experiences, Woolf did not distort her life to fit the narrative of a fictional work.[68] Nevertheless, one could assume that the autobiographical writings presented were somewhat filtered and idealized. Although the Memoir Club asked its members to speak with frankness and present their works unashamedly, Jeanne Schulkind, editor of *Moments of Being*, notes, "Leonard Woolf warns, 'absolute frankness, even among the most intimate, tends to be relative frankness.'"[69] This "relative frankness" can be attributed to both sides of the group, those who are commenting on the work and, more importantly, those presenting the work.

When compared to Woolf's memoir "A Sketch of the Past," which will be further analyzed in the subsequent section, the memoirs Woolf presented to the Memoir Club are more structured and methodical in their form. Rather than following a stream of consciousness style as in "A Sketch of the Past," each memoir is dedicated to a specific idea and moment of Woolf's life. With this more methodical and edited approach, one can argue that the "snapshots" Woolf writes about have been thought-out, revised, and somewhat filtered. For example, while her memoir, "22 Hyde Park Gate" explores some of the same relationships as in "A Sketch of the Past," Schulkind notes that the "21 pages typed by Virginia Woolf [had] a great many

---

[67] Ibid., 6.
[68] This idea can be seen in Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*.
[69] Virginia Woolf, "The Memoir Club Contributions: Editor's Note," in *Moments of Being*, 161.

corrections in pen and pencil. The pages have been erratically numbered, suggesting that the typescript may have passed through several stages of revision."[70] While she does not shy away from delicate subjects, such as being sexually abused by her half-brother George Duckworth, Woolf is also aware of her audience and filters her thoughts in such a way that her works are not as raw as in "A Sketch of the Past."

Additionally, rather than write the memoirs for purely cathartic or reflective use, these "filtered snapshots" were meant to entertain her audience while honing her creative abilities. While "A Sketch of the Past" details Woolf's intimate relationships between friends and family, the memoir, "Am I a Snob" takes on a light-hearted tone as Woolf examines a specific aspect of her personality: whether or not she has the "disease" known as snobbery.[71] Woolf continues to assess her encounters with various friends that prove to readers that she is, in fact, a snob; however, the memoir is meant to poke fun at Woolf's personality rather than reflect on past moments that molded her sense of self. The subjects of the memoirs and the revisions made to each work were carefully selected and edited for the purpose of catering to Woolf's audience, her close friends. Woolf would then accumulate feedback from her friends, and through this presentation and question-and-answer session, Virginia Woolf would hone her craft and develop her style of writing.

Nevertheless, while the memoirs presented to the Memoir Club were idealized and veiled snapshots of Woolf's life, presenting her autobiographical writing enabled Woolf to openly share her life without fear of harsh criticism. Woolf's decision to present her memoirs to the club seems to suggest that Woolf was gaining the confidence needed to be more forthright about her past experiences. At the same time, Woolf did not publish the memoirs she so carefully formed

---

[70] Virginia Woolf, "22 Hyde Park: Editor's Note," in *Moments of Being,* 162.
[71] Virginia Woolf, "Am I a Snob?," in *Moments of Being*, 207.

and edited; rather, the memoirs presented to the Memoir Club were all published posthumously.[72] Although Woolf and her friends created a space for women to write and share their lives, she was not yet ready to open the floodgate to public criticism of her life.

Invisible Presences: "A Sketch of the Past"

Although Woolf and the Memoir Club began to forge the path for women to begin writing and, more importantly, openly expressing their life stories, Woolf's most intimate memoir was kept private. It was not until *Moments of Being* was published in 1976 that the world was privy to the innermost workings of Woolf's past. While the memoirs Woolf presented to the Memoir Club were filtered snapshots of her life, her memoir "A Sketch of the Past" served as a cathartic tool to explore what experiences and relationships amassed to Woolf's sense of self.

While the chief object of this chapter is not to compare and contrast the types of memoir Woolf wrote, it is important to note the differences between the "filtered" and "unfiltered" snapshots Woolf writes. Primarily, the distinction between the "filtered" and "unfiltered" snapshots lies within the memoirs' structure and content. In the memoirs presented to the Memoir Club, each memoir addressed specific moments or subjects in Woolf's life and was highly edited. In contrast, in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf sometimes writes in a stream of consciousness style. Although she did not use the stream of consciousness style as the entire form of the memoir—some entries are more analytical—Woolf uses the style frequently throughout the work. Additionally, Woolf engages in associational thinking rather than following

[72] Within the editor's note in the 1985 edition of *Moments of Being*, Jeanne Schulkind sheds light on Woolf's posthumous publication. The autobiographical writings found in *Moments of Being* were selected from the Woolf archives at the British Library and the University of Sussex Library (the latter archive belonged to Leonard Woolf). When Leonard persuaded Quentin Bell to write *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (1972), her gave Bell the unpublished material for reference, which Bell quoted from in the biography. After Leonard died in 1969, the papers were passed to the University of Sussex. The copyrights passed on to Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett. They, along with Schulkind, must have decided that Woolf's memoirs, though not intended for publication, were worth sharing with the world.

a predetermined logic or outline by writing in a way that connects seemingly unrelated ideas as different thoughts arise in her mind. For example, when writing about the beauty in her family, Woolf writes, "This leads me to think that my—I would say 'our' if I knew enough about Vanessa, Thoby, and Adrian—but how little we know even about brothers and sisters—this leads me to think that my natural love for beauty was checked by some ancestral dread" ("Sketch" 68). Rather than following one idea throughout a sentence, Woolf flits from thought to thought.

The stream of consciousness style and use of associational thinking creates a fluid structure that suggests Woolf was not filtering her thoughts while she wrote.[73] Although this loose structure seems to create "an absence of coherence, a random heaping together of fragments of a life," ("Sketch" 75) this unfiltered structure enabled Woolf to explore different events of her past in "fits and starts," ("Sketch" 75) without filters or interruptions. Within this stream of consciousness style "a pattern emerges which expresses Virginia Woolf's view of the self generally, and herself in particular, in ways that a conventional autobiography could not have done." [74]

In addition to writing in a stream of consciousness style, Woolf's memoir is structured similarly to the diary she religiously kept, a date followed by an entry. On May 2, 1939, Woolf writes, "2nd May…I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present—at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon" ("Sketch" 75). In the memoirs presented to the Memoir Club, Woolf does not write the dates that she wrote a new section or edited an existing section; rather, the

[73] It is important to note that we now know Woolf engaged in some revision of "A Sketch of the Past." Thus, while some of her entries may have been the product of associational thinking, some entries that exhibit associational thinking and the stream of consciousness style were edited by Woolf to preserve this style rather than originally being written in a stream of consciousness form.

[74] Virginia Woolf, "Introduction," in *Moments of Being*, 12.

memoir is one complete thought. In contrast, by stating the present date before reflecting on the past, Woolf juxtaposes her past and present self. "It would be interesting," Woolf writes, "to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time" ("Sketch" 75). By mixing the present date with past experiences, Woolf comments on how the past and present selves work together to create a complete sense of self. The past and the present are not mutually exclusive. Just as Woolf's past experiences and relationships have affected who she is while writing her memoir, her present self affects how she remembers the past. Together, the past and present selves converge to create her complete sense of self.

Moreover, not only do her "unfiltered snapshots" differ from the "filtered" with regard to form, but the memoirs differ in their content. Rather than focusing on a specific subject or experience in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf attempts to identify and analyze the various "invisible presences" that impacted her life. Primarily focusing on her childhood experiences and her relationships, Woolf explores everything from her confined life at 22 Hyde Park Gate, her complicated relationship with her distant mother and domineering father, her relationship with her brother, George, who sexually abused both Woolf and her sister, Vanessa, and even the social pressures of Victorian society. Woolf asserts, "…well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject in the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes" ("Sketch" 80). If a person cannot define and understand the "invisible presences" that contribute to that person's "moments of being," then the person can never truly write about his or her life in a way that is meaningful and helpful.

Nevertheless, it is not simply what subjects Woolf writes about, but *how* she writes about her subjects. Woolf writes in a candid, unfiltered way so she may collectively understand who or

what she is writing about. For example, when first writing of her father, Leslie Stephen, she claims that he had "a way of impressing silence" ("Sketch" 110). Woolf's father "would say exactly what he thought, however inconvenient" and "he had a godlike, yet childlike, standing in the family…. he was somehow not bound by the laws of ordinary people" ("Sketch" 111). Moreover, her father "had a temper that he could not control" that was accepted by her mother because he "was exempt, because of his genius, from the laws of good society" ("Sketch" 110). Woolf knew "nothing of [her] sociable father" ("Sketch" 116) and held somewhat of a dark memory of her relationship with Leslie Stephen.

However, after documenting pages of memories she had of her father, Woolf concludes that her father "cannot have been as severe and melancholy and morose as I make him out…. Undoubtedly I colour my picture too dark" ("Sketch" 113). By writing many of the memories of her father using associational thinking, Virginia Woolf ultimately understands that the picture she had of her father represented only a sliver of the man he was. Eventually, Woolf sees much of herself in her father and how his presence impacted her sense of self. By writing about her father without fear of whom would be reading the memoir, Woolf uses her writing as a type of liberation and illumination on her past relationships. She claims, "…I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together" ("Sketch" 72). By weaving her past experiences together, Woolf came to terms with many of her past experiences and relationships. Instead of pain or confusion, delight and enlightenment transpired.

Nonetheless, while "A Sketch of the Past" was cathartic for Woolf and extremely poignant, she never published her autobiographical work. It was not until over thirty years after

her death that the world was exposed to the innermost workings of Woolf's life in *Moments of Being*.[75] The fact that Woolf kept her memoir from the public eye is interesting as the tone of the memoir is conversational, as if she is not just writing to herself but to another, as if she knew that someone might one day read her memoir. So why did Woolf decide to keep this intimate piece of writing private? A possible explanation is that Woolf, who was near the end of her life when she began writing "A Sketch of the Past," wished for her memoir to be published posthumously. Woolf may have predicted that one day this work would be published; however, she did not want to be alive and susceptible to the inevitable criticism or opinions that would follow. Because the memoir contains raw, delicate, intimate information not only about Woolf's life but about her thoughts toward her life, Woolf possibly desired to write her memoir for therapeutic, reflective purposes without being encumbered by thoughts about what critics would think of her life. Thus, while Virginia Woolf, author of essays, novels, biographies, and short stories, knew that there was a possibility that her memoirs would eventually be made public, she was not yet ready to share her autobiographical writings with the world.

[75] Virginia Woolf died in 1941, and *Moments of Being* was published in 1976.

Chapter III: Creating an Integrated Identity: Maya Angelou

From the United Kingdom, across the North Atlantic Ocean, to St. Louis, Missouri, Marguerite Johnson, more famously known as Maya Angelou, was born in 1928. Maya Angelou was a woman of firsts. Angelou was not only a civil rights activist, dancer, and singer, but she was also the first African-American woman streetcar conductor in San Francisco, California, the first African-American woman to have her screenplay produced, and the first African-American woman to write a nonfiction best-seller.[76] Indeed, Maya Angelou was a woman of firsts. More importantly, however, Angelou was a woman who, through her autobiographical writings, provided women, especially women of the African-American community, with a voice. In her poem, "Phenomenal Woman," Angelou proclaims, "I am a woman / Phenomenally. / Phenomenal woman / That's me."[77] Within her seven autobiographies, Angelou openly and unapologetically reveals what her life as a woman was like from the age of three onwards.

Although this chapter will focus on how Angelou's autobiography enabled her to create an integrated identity while illuminating to readers the struggles and triumphs of being a woman, one must first note the difference between the memoirs Virginia Woolf wrote and Angelou's autobiographies to be subsequently analyzed. Memoirs are like Polaroid snapshots. One click of the camera is equivalent to one moment in time. All one knows about the moment captured in the photograph is what one can deduce from the single picture. Woolf's memoirs were "snapshots" of her life, "moments of being" that revealed a veiled version of herself by flitting from memory

[76] "Maya Angelou Biography," *Biography*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.biography.com/people/maya-angelou-9185388.

[77] Maya Angelou, "Phenomenal Woman," in *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women* (New York: Random House, 1994), 3.

to memory, snapshot to snapshot. In contrast, autobiographies are like rolls of film. Rather than looking at one frame of a moment, a person may follow the entire roll to consume one fluid experience. Angelou's autobiographies unfold chronologically, documenting her life from ages three to forty, and readers experience her life as a continuous roll of film rather than in a series of snapshots. By writing autobiographies, Angelou creates an almost completely integrated identity.

However, Angelou did not simply write autobiographies. Specifically, she wrote *literary* autobiographies.[78] In 1969, Robert Loomis, Random House editor, requested Angelou to write her life story; however, when he asked, Angelou "recalled, 'I said, Absolutely not.'"[79] Nonetheless, Loomis "tried another ploy, phoning Ms. Angelou and saying, 'It's just as well, because to write an autobiography as literature is just about impossible,' [Angelou] recounted."[80] This statement struck a chord within Angelou, and she agreed to attempt to write a literary autobiography. Although Angelou was not the only woman writing autobiographies in the twenty-first century, Angelou took the autobiography form and experimented with the genre to write an autobiography that read as literature.

Nevertheless, unlike Austen and Woolf, who used their autobiographical tendencies for reflective purposes, Angelou states, "Strangely enough, not as a cathartic force, not really; at any rate I never thought that really I was interested or am interested in autobiography for its recuperative power. I liked the form—the literary form…."[81] While her autobiographies may have had some cathartic influence for Angelou, her primary objective was not to use this genre

---

[78] Although Angelou wrote literary autobiographies, I will refer to them as "autobiographies" for the remainder of the chapter.

[79] Dinitia Smith, "A Career in Letters, 50 Years and Counting," *The New York Times*, Jan. 2007, accessed April 30, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/books/23loom.html.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Carol Neubauer and Maya Angelou, "An Interview with Maya Angelou," *The Massachusetts Review* 28, no. 2 (1987), accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/25089856, 286.

as a type of catharsis; rather, Angelou's autobiographies were used to reveal and proclaim to the world "the truth of her life without apology. [Angelou] eschewed code. Angelou had the courage to name names, give dates, and say yes, this is me, this is my body…."[82] This chapter analyzes Angelou's autobiographical tendencies through three sections: "The Self Unveiled: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*," "Anonymous No Longer: Autobiography and the Integrated Identity," and "We Write, We Reveal, We Rise: Maya Angelou's Autobiographical Impact."

The Self Unveiled: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

In a series of exclusive interviews with authors and poets such as Yann Martel and Lemn Sissay MBE, Vikas Shah probed Angelou, "Why do we write?"[83] She poignantly answered:

> We write for the same reason that we walk, talk, climb mountains or swim the oceans- because we can. We have some impulse within us that makes us want to explain ourselves to other human beings. That's why we paint, that's why we dare to love someone- because we have the impulse to explain who we are. Not just how tall we are, or thin… but who we are internally… perhaps even spiritually. There's something, which impels us to show our inner-souls. The more courageous we are, the more we succeed in explaining what we know.[84]

In order to explain who she was, Angelou published seven autobiographies and was working on an eighth when she died in 2014. The most acclaimed autobiography Angelou wrote was her first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Documenting her life from ages three to seventeen, Angelou openly writes about growing up as a black girl in the segregated South.

---

[82] Stacy Parker Le Melle, "A Praise Song for Maya Angelou," in *Callaloo* 37, no. 5 (2014): 1039, accessed March 25, 2017, https://muse.jhu.edu/.

[83] Vikas Shah, "Why We Write," *Thought Economics*, accessed March 25, 2017, https://thoughteconomics.com/why-we-write/.

[84] Ibid.

Within this autobiography, Angelou speaks with unveiled candor on everything from her relationships with her family members, her traumatic experience of being raped at the age of eight by her mother's boyfriend, her experiences with racism in Stamps, Arkansas, and even her moments of questioning her own sexuality. For example, when speaking about being raped, Angelou does not shy away from the pain and confusion of the moment. Rather, she straightforwardly conveys the scene, writing:

> He released me just enough to snatch down my bloomers and then dragged me closer to him…. Then there was pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can't. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot. I thought I had died—I woke up in a white-walled world and it had to be heaven. But Mr. Freeman was there and he was washing me.[85]

Moreover, Angelou does not withhold the shame and confusion she felt about the experience, stating, "I didn't want to admit that I had in fact liked his holding me or that I had liked his smell or the hard heart-beating…" (*I Know* 84). By writing of such a traumatic experience in such a matter-of-fact way, Angelou allows readers to place themselves in the memory and experience the pain she felt.

Additionally, Angelou conveys her experiences with racism and growing up in segregated Stamps, Arkansas. According to Angelou, "Stamps, Arkansas, was Chitlin' Switch, Georgia; Hang 'Em High, Alabama; Don't Let the Sun Set on You Here, Nigger, Mississippi; or any other name just as descriptive. People in Stamps used to say that the whites in our town were so prejudiced that a Negro couldn't buy vanilla ice cream" (*I Know* 53). Angelou documents

---

[85] Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House, 2015), 84.

several instances of racism such as the terror of having to hide her Uncle Willy from the Klan by placing him in an empty bin covered with potatoes and onions as well as her deeply revered grandmother, Momma, standing outside her store while being chastised by a group of white girls who "mocked that strange carriage that was Annie Henderson" (*I Know* 32).

Moreover, Angelou frankly writes of her eighth-grade graduation, a time for celebration that was marred by racism. While listening to a white male speak at the black graduation, Angelou comments, "Owens and the Brown Bomber were great heroes in our world, but what school official in the white-goddom of Little Rock had the right to decide that those two men must be our only heroes?" (*I Know* 192) Angelou describes how hopelessness takes the place of her excitement, expressing, "It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense" (*I Know* 194). By candidly speaking on the struggles and triumphs of living as a young girl in a world that continually judged a person against the color of their skin rather than the character of their person, Angelou's "story of her childhood became a testament to an oft-denied truth: the lives of black girls and black women counted. They counted just as much as the lives of anyone else."[86] Stacey Parker Le Melle, workshop director of the Afghan Women's Writing Project, claims, "[Angelou] spoke for our grandmothers, for our mothers, for any of us not able to tell the whole of our story without fear of violence and rejection."[87]

While critics may argue that Angelou's memories are idealized and somewhat fictional due to the acute attention to detail and colorful conversations in the text, Angelou attributes her sharp memory to the five years of being mute after she was raped. In an interview with Carol

[86] Stacy Parker Le Melle, "A Praise Song for Maya Angelou," 1039.
[87] Ibid.

Neubauer, Angelou claims, "I think my memory was developed in queer ways, because I remember—I have total recall—or I have nothing at all…. But when I remember it, I will remember *everything* about it. *Everything*. The outside noises, the odors in the room, the way my clothes were feeling—everything."[88] Thus, while she selects the memories she writes about, Angelou only writes about the memories she acutely remembers.

Although Angelou wrote *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* after being dared and accepting the challenge to write a literary autobiography, Angelou's ability and courage to write honestly and candidly about her life not only gave her a voice, but encouraged other women, especially African-American women, to find and express their own voices.

Anonymous No Longer: Autobiography and the Integrated Identity

Angelou became a public icon for women and the African-American community, and the literary autobiography reached national acclaim, opening the door for Angelou to write six subsequent autobiographies and create a more integrated identity. While Austen scatters parts of her identity throughout her various works of fictions, Woolf portrays a more integrated identity through her memoirs. Nevertheless, by writing about her life from the ages of 3 to 40, Angelou creates one of the most comprehensive identities one can write.

Each autobiography Angelou wrote takes on a distinct "voice" to fit the Angelou of that time. Angelou claims, "I've tried in each book to let the new voice come through and that's what makes it very difficult for me not to impose the voice of 1980 onto the voice I'm writing from 1950, possibly."[89] In each autobiography, Angelou believed she came close to conveying the voice of that specific Angelou. While in *Gather Together in My Name* (1974) Angelou recreates the voice "of that young girl—eratic, sporadic, fractured," Angelou crafts "rather a

[88] Carol Neubauer and Maya Angelou, "An Interview with Maya Angelou," 289.
[89] Ibid., 286.

sassy person" in *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976).[90] Thus, each "voice" represents a distinct version of Angelou, and when placed side by side, the "voices" meld together to construct an integrated identity that continues to evolve and add new dimensions. Like a living individual, each "new" voice creates another wrinkle in the fabric that amasses to a person's sense of self.

Nonetheless, while Angelou shapes this integrated identity, it is impossible to fashion a completely cohesive identity. Since her autobiographies are extensive and wide-ranging, Angelou herself admits that she still has a selective process for which memories she chooses to write. Although Angelou states that "some [experiences] are more rich,"[91] she refuses to write about them. Angelou asserts, "I do not select them because it's very hard to write drama without falling into melodrama. So the incidents I reject, I find myself unable to write about without becoming melodramatic."[92] However, when questioned if she ever chooses an incident that may not have happened to use as a substitute, Angelou unequivocally states, "No, because there are others which worked, which did happen…. No, I never sacrificed [the core of the experience]. It's just choosing which of those greens or which of those reds to make that kind of feeling."[93] Angelou consciously chooses what memories she reveals to the world; however, she does not attempt to veil her experiences or sacrifice the emotions she is portraying. Therefore, as Loomis notes, although selective, "Maya is her books."[94] Angelou's autobiographies are the aggregate of

---

[90] Ibid., 287.
[91] Ibid., 288.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid. The "greens" and the "reds" Angelou refers to are the types of experiences she is writing about.
[94] Shanthi Nehemiah, "Engaging Autobiography as an Expression of Self Maya Angelou's Autobiographies and Her Black Self," in *Language In India* 9, no. 1 (2009): 8, *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCO*host*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=36362474&site=ehost-live.

her identity and sense of self. Together, the seven autobiographies amass to create an almost fully integrated identity.

We Write, We Reveal, We Rise: Maya Angelou's Legacy

While it may not have been her primary purpose to write her autobiographies for cathartic purposes, Angelou's autobiographical works proved cathartic for many. After Angelou exposed her life to the public, African-American women felt understood, liberated, and united. However, although Angelou was and still is an icon to the African American community, the writer was "once quoted saying, 'I speak to the black experience, but I am always talking about the human condition—about what we can endure, dream, fail at, and still survive.'"[95] Angelou supersedes race and speaks to the human experience, allowing her autobiographical writings to extend to the core of a person's sense of self rather than the color of their skin.

Furthermore, Angelou not only challenged racial stigmas, she also confronted gender norms, not only writing, but proclaiming to the world, "This is what it is like to be a woman." In her poem, "Still I Rise," Angelou states, "You may shoot me with your words, / You may cut me with your eyes, / You may kill me with your hatefulness, / But still, like air, I'll rise."[96] Rather than be fearful of what critics might have said about her life, Angelou writes the self unabashedly. Angelou did not make an effort to "conceal the pain but a great deal to reveal how she incorporates the negative and positive aspects of herself that enable her to meet the challenges of the world in which she must strive to live."[97] By portraying her life in an unfiltered way, Maya Angelou encouraged all women, no matter their ethnicity, to write about their lives

---

[95] Joanne M. Braxton and Courtney M. O'Reilly, "Angelou, Maya" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History: Volume 1,* ed. Bonnie G. Smith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 111.

[96] Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise," in *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women*, 8.

[97] Shanthi Nehemiah, "Engaging Autobiography as an Expression of Self Maya Angelou's Autobiographies and Her Black Self," *op cit*.

boldly and unapologetically. Angelou once asserted, "I'm convinced of this: Good done anywhere is good done everywhere…. As long as you're breathing, it's never too late to do some good."[98] Maya Angelou did good in many ways; however, possibly one of her most admirable acts was encouraging women to embolden one another and help each other find their voice.

[98] Frank Johnson, *The Very Best of Maya Angelou: The Voice of Inspiration* (CreateSpace Publishing, 2014).

Conclusion

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf warily asserts, that the "natural simplicity, the epic age of women's writing, may have gone…. The impulse towards autobiography may be spent. [Women] may be beginning to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression" (79). Nevertheless, from scattered identities in fiction to nearly integrated identities in autobiographies, this thesis has explored how women, from the cusp of the 18th century to present day, continue to find new genres and platforms to write about their lives. With every passing century, women become more forthright and candid about how they live their lives and the "moments of being" that have shaped them into the women who are writing.

This thesis ends with the genre of autobiography as a culmination of creating an integrated identity. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that autobiography is not the sole method of autobiographical writing in the twenty-first century. Rather, there has been a resurgence of the use of memoirs to write about one's life. In an article for *The New York Times*, Linda Joy Myers, President and Founder of the National Association of Memoir Writers, asserts many of the people who enroll in memoir classes are "'women in midlife who are claiming their voice.'"[99] From Tina Fey's *Bossypants* to Cheryl Strayed's *Wild,* women and men alike have gravitated towards memoir as a method of self-expression. The memoirs, nonetheless, have evolved since the time of Woolf's writing. Memoirs of the twenty-first century seem to mix the literary form of Woolf's memoirs with the candidness of Angelou's autobiography. Although still only

[99] Elizabeth Olson, "Appeal of Writing Memoirs Grows, as Do Publishing Options," *The New York Times*, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/11/business/appeal-of-penning-memoirs-grows-along-with-publishing-options.html?_r=0.

representing "snapshots" of a person's life, the memoirs are not as veiled as the memoirs of the twentieth century.

While fiction, memoir, and autobiography have proven to be effective genres for autobiographical writing, I find myself wondering, "Are we then restricted to these three genres if we are to write about our lives?" The answer, after much thought, seems to be a resounding "No." Although women continue to write about their lives through the three genres analyzed in this thesis, the age of technology and social media has created an entirely new platform for women to write about their lives. Increasingly, "writing the self" involves 140 character tweets on Twitter or filtered photos with a witty caption on Instagram. Rather than reading an entire memoir or autobiography to know about a person's intimate life, one can simply scroll through a person's timeline. A "heart" or "retweet" validates a person sense of self and encourages, or alternatively discourages, a person to continue documenting his or her life. Moreover, women are being drawn to blogging about their lives. Rather than going through a publishing process, women simply create an account, write a "snapshot" of their life, press submit, and their lives are accessible with a click of the mouse.

Although the social media and blogging platform has its downsides, such as causing a person to seek validation by only posting or tweeting what he or she feels society approves of, the rise of this new platform also makes it possible for women to encourage other women to share their story. The "internet of things" connects everyone in a way that was not possible in Austen, Woolf, or Angelou's time. Through the social media and blogging platforms, a woman's autobiographical writing (be that a tweet, photo, or blog) can go viral in mere minutes. Suddenly, a support system grows and women are encouraged to continue to write about their lives with

even more candor as they find other women who are experiencing the same situations or emotions.

Each of the authors in this thesis were able to separate themselves from their lives in order to explore what or who contributed to their sense of self. It is imperative for women to separate themselves from their lives and identify the "invisible presences" that amass to their own identity. If we fail to reflect on our lives and how we became the women we are, we cannot fully understand our sense of self. Women will continue to find new methods to write about their lives, because other women writers, such as Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and Maya Angelou, set the precedent, broke the mold, and showed other women writing the self was not only possible, but, more importantly, was and is still necessary.

Bibliography

Works Cited:

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* New York: Random House, 2015.

Angelou, Maya. "Phenomenal Woman." In *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Angelou, Maya. "Still I Rise." In *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Auerbach, Emily. "An Excellent Heart: *Sense and Sensibility*." In *Bloom's Modern Critical View: Jane Austen*, Edited by Harold Bloom. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009.

Austen, Henry. "Biographical Notice of the Author." In *Northanger Abbey: An Annotated Edition / Jane Austen*, Edited by Susan J. Wolfson. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

Austen, Jane. *Jane Austen's Letters*, Edited by Deirdre Le Faye. 4th Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Austen, Jane. *Persuasion,* Edited by Antje Blank and Janet Todd. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, Edited by Pat Rogers. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, Edited by Edward Copeland. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Austen-Leigh, James Edward. *A Memoir of Jane Austen.* London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1886.

Austen-Leigh, William. *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, Edited by Deirdre Le Faye. 2nd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Braxton, Joanne M. and Courtney M. O'Reilly. "Angelou, Maya." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History: Volume 1*, Edited by Bonnie G. Smith. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Butler, Marilyn. "Austen, Jane (1775–1817)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online Edition, Edited by David Cannadine, January 2010. Accessed November 4, 2016. http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/article/904.

Chapman, R. W. "Mansfield Park." *Times Literary Supplement*. In *Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive*, no: 1558, (1931): 1006. Accessed April 4, 2017. http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=txshracd2598&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200041386&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0.

Gordon, Lyndall. "Woolf, (Adeline) Virginia (1882–1941)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: OUP, 2005. Online Edition, Edited by David Cannadine. Accessed March 26, 2017. http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/article/37018.

Johnson, Frank. *The Very Best of Maya Angelou: The Voice of Inspiration*. CreateSpace Publishing, 2014.

Jones, Vivien. Women in the Eighteenth Century. Florence: Taylor and Francis, 1990. Accessed April 6, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/lib/utxa/reader.action?docID=178290&ppg=8.

Judge, Jeannie Sargent. ""Persuasion," Feminism, and the New Psychology of Women: Anne Elliot's Constancy, Courage, and Creativity." In *Journal of Thought* 36, no. 2 (2001): 39-54. http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/42590264.

Kirkham, Margaret. *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*. New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983.

Le Melle, Stacy Parker. "A Praise Song for Maya Angelou." In *Callaloo* 37, no. 5 (2014): 1035-1041. Accessed March 25, 2017. https://muse.jhu.edu/.

"Maya Angelou Biography." *Biography*. Accessed March 25, 2017. http://www.biography.com/people/maya-angelou-9185388.

Nehemiah, Shanthi. "Engaging Autobiography as an Expression of Self Maya Angelou's Autobiographies and Her Black Self." In *Language In India* 9, no. 1 (2009): 8. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. EBSCO*host*. Accessed March 25, 2017. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=36362474&site=ehost-live.

Neubauer, Carol E., and Maya Angelou. "An Interview with Maya Angelou." *The Massachusetts Review* 28, no. 2 (1987): 286-92. Accessed March 24, 2017. http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/25089856.

Nokes, David. *Jane Austen: A Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Olson, Elizabeth. “Appeal of Writing Memoirs Grows, as Do Publishing Options.” *The New York Times*. Accessed March 26, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/11/business/appeal-of-penning-memoirs-grows-along-with-publishing-options.html?_r=0.

Perkins, Moreland. *Reshaping the Sexes in Sense and Sensibility*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1998.

Perry, Ruth. "Sleeping with Mr. Collins, (Conference Papers)." In *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 22 (2000): 119+. Literature Resource Center. Accessed April 5, 2017. http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=txshracd2598&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA80370746&asid=e03afae356a82a6ba706f467b34bb901.

Rosenbaum, S.P. *Victorian Bloomsbury: Volume 1: The Early History of the Bloomsbury Group* Victorian Bloomsbury. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1987.

Shah, Vikas. “Why We Write.” *Thought Economics*. Accessed March 25, 2017. https://thoughteconomics.com/why-we-write/.

Shoemaker, Robert. *Gender in English Society 1660-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Smith, Dinitia. “A Career in Letters, 50 Years and Counting.” *The New York Times*. Jan. 2007. Accessed April 30, 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/books/23loom.html.

Southam, Brian. *Jane Austen and the Navy*. New York: Hambledon and London Ltd, 2000.

Spence, Jon. *Becoming Jane Austen: A Life*. New York: Hambledon and London, 2003.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*, Foreword by Mary Gordon. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1989.

Woolf, Virginia. “A Sketch of the Past.” In *Moments of Being*, Edited by Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd Edition. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1985.

Woolf, Virginia. “Am I a Snob?” In *Moments of Being*, Edited by Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd Edition. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1985.

Woolf, Virginia. “Introduction.” In *Moments of Being*, Edited by Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd Edition. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1985.

Woolf, Virginia. “The Memoir Club Contributions: Editor’s Note.” In *Moments of Being*, Edited by Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd Edition. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1985.

Woolf, Virginia. “22 Hyde Park Gate: Editor’s Note.” In *Moments of Being*, Edited by Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd Edition. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1985.

Works Consulted:

Angelou, Maya. “Caged Bird.” In *Maya Angelou: The Complete Poetry*. New York: Random House, 2015.

Baker, Hannah and Elaine Clause. *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England.* New York: Routledge, 2014.

Hussey, Mark. "The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club." *Woolf Studies Annual*, vol. 21, (2015): 151-155. EBSCO*host*. Accessed March 25, 2017. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hft&AN=102007924&site=ehost-live.

Monaghan, David. *Jane Austen in a Social Context*. New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Edited by Eileen Hunt Botting, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Biography

Jenny Claire Whitlow was born on September 29th, 1994, in Amarillo, Texas, where she resided with her father, mother, and older sister for eighteen years. In 2013, Jenny Claire began a new journey at The University of Texas at Austin as a Plan II major, adding a Supply Chain Management major along the way. During her time at UT, Jenny Claire enjoyed fostering friendships and participating in organizations such as Texas Darlins and UT Best Buddies. She will graduate in May 2017. Jenny Claire will continue to reside in Austin and work in Round Rock, Texas, at Dell Technologies as a BMS Process Senior Analyst. She looks forward to spending time in the Austin sunshine, drawing, and curling up with a nice cup of coffee and good book.